

THE CANONS OF THE COUNCIL OF ŠAHAPIVAN

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The Council of Šahapivan is the first Armenian Church council of which the acts have survived in Classical Armenian manuscripts. It was an effort to bring order to the Armenian Church following the death of St. Sahak. The Council was called and convened by Catholicos Yovsēp I¹, a disciple of Maštoc', who was elected to the catholical throne, but never confirmed by the Persian authorities.

The acts of the Council clearly indicate that the meeting was chosen to convene on an annual major feast day, "during the time of the feast of the First-Fruits"², in order not to alert the Persians about the Council's agenda for reformation. The reference to the annual feast of the First-Fruits points to the liturgical season during which the Council was convened. Another bit of information that helps scholars date the time of the Council is the phrase in the beginning of the introduction to the canons, "The following canons were established and organized unanimously by the leaders of the Armenians in the seventh year after the death of St. Sahak"³, and "in the

¹ The fifth-century Armenian historian Łazar P'arpec'i informs us how a certain Yovsēp from the province of Vayoc' C'or ascended to the patriarchal throne after the death of St. Mashtots. He is first referred to as a *locum tenens*, and then Catholicos of the church in Armenia. See LP'-T, p. 74 and 80–81. The historian Koriwn refers to Catholicos Yovsēp as the "principal of the council", most probably referring to the Council of Šahapivan. Catholicos Yovsēp was exiled and martyred in AD 454. K-M, col. XXV–XXVII.

² The feast of the First Fruits in Armenia was part of the festivities of the month of Navasard, which included New Year's Day. Armenians, influenced by their neighboring Persians, gathered on the first day of the month of Navasard to celebrate the feast of the First Fruits. With the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of Armenia, St. Gregory "fixed the date for celebrating the commemoration of the martyrs that he had brought as a major festival, at the time of the worship of the former vain (gods)...., which they previously used to celebrate in that same place on the festival of the New Year's Day". Aa, p. 371. See also Akinian (1947), p. 173–180.

³ Armenian historians confirm that St. Sahak died on the first year of the reign of Yezgard (Yezdgerd) II as the King of Persia (AD 438). See K-M, p. 48–49; Kouymjian (1985), S. XXXVII; and Thomson (1989), p. 160. See M. Ormanian (2002), col. 228.

sixth year of the reign of the Persian King Yezgard". This dates the Council to the year 444AD.

The earliest reference to the Council of Šahapivan and its canons in Armenian literature seems to be an indirect reference by Catholicos Abraham of Ałbat'ank' (AD 607–615)⁴. Concerning those who reject the Church's prohibition of marriage between members of the same family to the fourth degree, an encyclical attributed to Catholicos Abraham declares, "As for the haughty and those who love to fight against the Holy Spirit, to them you will hand down the decree of the canon which the blessed fathers confirmed in Christ, and which is preserved up to now like the inextinguishable sun. The beginning [of legal marriage] is from the fifth [generation] on"⁵. The phrase "decree of the canon" must be a reference to Canon XIII of the Council of Šahapivan and its warnings against marriage among relatives. We do not know of any other church council in Armenian Church history, convened before AD 615, which discussed the issue of marriage among family members, allowing marriage only "from the fifth generation on."

Catholicos Yovhannēs Imastasēr Awjnec'i (AD 717–728) incorporated the canons of Šahapivan into the first formal collection of ecclesiastical canons in the Armenian Church. This collection, known as *Kanonagirk'* (hereafter, "Canon Book")⁶, included the canons of the first three ecumenical councils and of other regional councils, as well as decrees by *vardapets* and bishops of the Church. In addition to the canons, Awjnec'i also included the text of the introduction to the canons of Šahapivan. It is thanks to this work by Awjnec'i that the Council of Šahapivan was known to the later historians, and its text preserved until today in many manuscripts of the Canon Book.

In 1930, based on the Armenian manuscripts in the Mxit'arist monastery of Vienna, Fr. Nerses Akinian published his study of the Council of Šahapivan. In his book *Šahapivani žotovoyn kanonnerě*, Fr. Akinian offers the only complete and detailed examination of the text and contents of the canons of Šahapivan. The second part of his book includes the Classical Armenian text of the acts of the Council of Šahapivan with critical apparatus pointing to the different manuscript variations compared to the published text.

⁴ Ormanian (2002), col. 411–413.

⁵ Thomson (2000), p. 257.

⁶ Ormanian (2002), col. 265. The title "Canon Book" is a literal translation of the compound word *kanonagirk'* in Classical Armenia, which refers to the corpus of ecclesiastical law. This is a collection of the legislation promulgated by the Bible, ecumenical Church councils, regional and local Armenian Church councils and decrees of the Armenian catholicoi and patriarchs. The earliest collection is attributed to the eighth-century catholicos, Yovhannēs Awjnec'i. See Mardirossian (2004).

More than three decades later, in 1964, Vazgen Hakobyan published in Classical Armenian the complete text of the acts of the Council of Šahapivan, including its twenty canons, as part of the two-volume *Canon Book of the Armenians*⁷. To date this work remains the closest version to a critical edition of the code of law of the Armenian Church.

It is obvious from the introduction to the Council of Šahapivan and the strictness of the resolutions expressed in its canons that the need for such an ecclesiastical council was urgent. The urgency was highlighted by the decay of moral life and the chaos that existed in the ecclesiastical and governmental ranks in Armenia.

The eminent clergy and leaders of the Armenian people assembled in Šahapivan and established twenty canons, which are referred to as “chapters” or “headings” of the Council. The greater part of these canons dealt with the various grades of the clergy. The canons regulated their moral life and their interactions with others, imposing severe punitive measures in cases of noncompliance and infraction. The Council discouraged extreme asceticism in the form of total seclusion and complete detachment from any religious community. Marriage was maintained as a holy union between a man and a woman who shared no blood relation. The Council strictly forbade the practice of witchcraft, sorcery and soothsaying.

A definite distinguishing element of the canons of Šahapivan is the prescribed severe punitive consequences. Corporal punishment was an essential part of the punitive system in the Council of Šahapivan, which included extreme measures such as caning, hamstringing and branding. Different amounts of financial penalties were also applied to the various crimes and violations. This was supposed to eradicate all the immoral and non-Christian practices that still existed in the ways of living and patterns of behavior among the Armenians, more than a century after their conversion to Christianity and the official establishment of the church in Armenia.

Finally, the Council of Šahapivan was definitely a turning point in the history of the Armenian people and Church. Issues such as the equality between noblemen and peasants, bishops and deacons, clergymen and laity in the eyes of the law were discussed in Šahapivan centuries before they were even addressed in the churches of the West.

Despite the importance of the Council of Šahapivan and its canons, only very few partial translations in English and French exist. The following is the first complete translation of its acts and canons into English.

⁷ KH.

THE TEXT

**The Šahapivan Canons of the Armenians:
Twenty Chapters⁸**

- I. A bishop who is found in defilement
- II. A priest who is found in defilement
- III. Adulterers
- IV. Wife repudiators
- V. Whoever leaves a barren woman
- VI. A wife who leaves her husband
- VII. Kidnappers
- VIII. Sorcerers
- IX. Whoever goes to soothsayers
- X. Those who enchant but do not cast a spell
- XI. Those who hopelessly lament the dead
- XII. Whoever sleeps with his stepmother
- XIII. Whoever takes a relative as his wife
- XIV. Whoever has a house-woman⁹
- XV. Whoever wants to become a cleric¹⁰
- XVI. Whoever pays silver [money] to become a bishop
- XVII. Concerning the relics of the martyrs
- XVIII. A *vardapet* who anathematizes a disciple
- XIX. A priest who is found in lechery
- XX. A bishop who has knowledge [about an evildoer]

The following canons were established and organized in unanimous agreement by the leaders of the Armenians in the seventh year of the death of St. Sahak¹¹.

Constitutions and canons for the order of the holy church of God, which the Armenian *vardapets* established to complete the foundation of the Apostolic and Nicene canons.

⁸ Other manuscripts have different titles, such as “The Twenty Headings [or Chapters] of the Armenian Canons” and “The Twenty Headings of the Canons of the Armenian Council”. See KH, p. 627 and Akinian (1950), p. 5.

⁹ The Armenian word for “house-woman” can also be translated as “housekeeper”. In both cases the phrase in the context of this canon means “mistress”.

¹⁰ The Armenian word for “cleric”, *krawnawor*, literally means “a religious person”. See Hovhannessian (2004), p. 82–84.

¹¹ This paragraph is traditionally accepted as a later insertion in the text of the canons of Šahapivan by Catholicos Yovhannēs Awjneg‘i (AD 717–728). See KH, p. 627.

It is mandatory and proper for a shipmaster to care about the workings of the ship, to watch the paths of the sea and, depending on the wind, to travel the waves of the sea. Likewise, the general [*zawravavar*] must always have his troops inspected, the infantry and the select horsemen — those with weaponry and the armed cavalry — in order to be victorious and receive a crown and honor from the king. Thus, it is much more suitable and just for the *vardapets*, the pastors of the holy church and the leaders of the laws of justice and of the true commandments of the living God “to meditate always on the laws of the Lord, by day and by night”¹², and to adorn always the children of the Church with new feathers in the Lord.

After the passing from this world of the *vardapets*, the righteous fathers and the true and law-affirming primates, and especially St. Sahak, the holy chief-priest and Katholikos of Armenians and the spiritual, spirit-bearing, and truth-loving *vardapet* Mesrob, who had enlightened the land of the Armenians with his teachings, the frequent doers of evil were multiplying and growing. Lawlessness increased because of the scarcity of love¹³. And there was no one to cut the weeds and to clear away the harmful nettles, because tares was taking root and spreading day after day. There was an increase in licentious people and of evildoers of various sorts — repudiators, prostitutes, thieves, the self-willed and all kinds of devious men — in this realm of the Armenians, in the house of Torgom. And there was mourning and grief. Those who at one time were zealous *vardapets*, bishops and elders¹⁴ who had taken the vow of holiness, ministers of Christ, and children of the holy church, and even those who had taken the vow of priesthood, were not living according to the righteous path of holiness. Moreover, power and dominion in those days were not in the hands of the Mamikonean clan, because they were in hiding, forced to submit and obey the dominant Persian rule. Although Vartan Mamikonean with his brothers, relatives and others, were mourning, groaning, and roaring like lion cubs, as if imprisoned in a cage, they were hoping for help from above [heaven], because the wicked nation of Persia was suspicious and frightened and would not give authority into their hands.

¹² Ps 1:2.

¹³ Matt 24:12.

¹⁴ The Armenian word for “elder”, *erēc* can be translated also as “priest” or “presbyter”. Another word for “priest” in Armenian is *k’ahanay*. However, since the two words *erēc* and *k’ahanay* are used in the canons of Šahapivan, and in many cases interchangeably, the word *erēc* in this article will be translated as “elder” whereas the word *k’ahanay* will be translated as “priest”.

And day after day, the word sprang forth, and night showed to night the works of dishonor¹⁵. The news spread word by word from man to man and everyone heard it. They came and gathered by the order of the brotherhood in the designated place, in Šahapivan, in the camp [*banakett*] of the Armenian kings, during the time of the feast of the First-Fruits [*noraber*]. And this happened in the sixth year of the reign of the Persian king Yezgard [the second], and during Armenia's *marzpanate*¹⁶ by Vasak of Siwni, and the *hazarapetate*¹⁷ of Vahan Amatuni, and the [tenure of] chief *matxaz* Vru of Xoixoruni.

Thus, forty bishops¹⁸ gathered with elders, numerous deacons, zealous clerks and the entire clergy of the holy church, all the lords [*tēr*] of the provinces [*gawarateark'*], chiefs of the provinces [*gawarakalk'*], tyrants [*bīnawork'*], army commanders [*zawragluxk'*], chiliards [*hazarawork'*], governors [*kusakalk'*], and noblemen [*azatk'*] from different places who were zealous about the laws and holiness. Together they said, "You affirm the order established by saints Gregory, Nersēs, Sahak and Maštoc', and whatever else that is good according to you, and willingly and with pleasure we will fully commit ourselves. For the regulations of the church are loosened and people have returned to lawlessness. Now, you arrange the laws, which are pleasing to God and which build up His church, and we will submit to them and keep them firm. And if anyone does not keep the orders of these laws, whether a bishop, an elder, a nobleman or a peasant, let him bear the penalty and pay the fine". And the senior clergy unanimously said, "the Apostolic and the Nicean canons remain firm and we are obedient to them. However, [we will add] whatever is necessary to complete the same canons, especially in the house of Torgom and the eastern regions". Then they organized and established [canons] as follows:

I. If a bishop is found in defilement or fornication or any kind of evil act, and he has desecrated the apostolic honor and the holy throne; of such people the Scriptures say, "You make friends with thieves and keep your portion with adulterers"¹⁹. If this is exposed by witnesses, let the bishop

¹⁵ Ps 19:2.

¹⁶ The Armenian word *marzpan*, may be translated as "governor", "ruler of a village", "ruler of a region" or "magistrate".

¹⁷ The Armenian word *hazarapet* literally means "the commander of thousand [soldiers]".

¹⁸ Some manuscripts mention "twenty" bishops attending the Council. The confusion is caused by a scribal error in copying the alphabet characters that express the number twenty [*i*] and forty [*x*], which are very similar in Armenian. Cf. Akinian (1950), p. 23.

¹⁹ Ps 50:18.

be removed from his throne and his authority, and not serve the priesthood. Let him pay the church one thousand two hundred drams and let him take the blame on himself. For the man was in honor but did not know²⁰. And let them distribute the fine to the needy. For it is mandatory for him “to meditate always on the laws of the Lord, by day and by night”²¹, and “to keep His commandments”²², and not to fall into the path that goes astray, but “to walk along the king’s way, not turning right or left”²³, so that the disciples may not learn the same evil teaching.

II. If a priest is found in defilement or fornication or in other evil acts, and his deeds are exposed by witnesses, let him not serve the priesthood. He must pay a fine of three hundred drams, which should be distributed among the poor, and he will stand in the rank of the acolytes. And if while in the rank of the acolytes he is found in the same defilement, let him be expelled from his order and from the rank of the acolytes until he returns to the true path through penance. And by observing his path, the bishop may allow him to stand with the acolytes. For the church desires what is holy — especially at the Lord’s table of mystery, which accepts only the pure — so that the wrath of God may not be awakened upon the earth because of the [church] leaders.

If a married elder is found in defilement or in fornication or in other evil acts, and these are proven by witnesses, let his priesthood be annulled and let him be removed from the portion (*bažin*) of the church. He will pay a fine of three hundred drams, which will be distributed to the needy. The same canon applies for elders and deacons. They will be assigned to the military ranks [*karg*] and [pay] the royal taxes, and they may not mix with the clerks.

If the wife of an elder or of a deacon is found in fornication, let him be the one to choose, either the church and the priesthood or the wife. If he chooses the priesthood, the wife should be removed from the house and a severe penance should be imposed on her.

And if the daughter of a priest is found in fornication, let her have no part in the fellowship of the church and let her be removed from the priest’s house. Let a severe penance and penalty be imposed on her. And the same penalty will apply to the son of an elder. And if the elder dies, the wife must not marry another man. Neither can an elder take another wife. And

²⁰ Ps 48:12 and 20 [Septuagint].

²¹ Ps 1:2.

²² Matt 19:17.

²³ Num 20:17.

a prostitute [*ataxin pořnik*]²⁴ must not live in the house of a priest, for it is the [place of the] Lord's holiness.

III. If anyone who has a wife fornicates and does not keep the purity of the sacrament of marriage and of the crown, which he received on his head by the hand of the priest in the church, as did his helper who was chosen for him according to the Scriptures — I gave the man his wife as his helper²⁵, and the proclamation, “Honorable is marriage and immaculate is the bed of those who are coupled in purity, for God will judge the adulterers and the fornicators”²⁶; and again, “The husband does not rule over his body but the wife does. Likewise, the wife does not rule over her body but the husband”²⁷ — thus, whoever has received the blessed and delightful life from God by the glory of the holy church, and then strikes it with his foot and makes the blessed marriage that God has given him, a doormat by defilement, by falling into fornication and adultery, and by being a partner of the drunkards, let the chiefs rebuke such a person, by caning and beneficially counseling him. And let him be removed from the church and pay a fine to the church, which should be distributed to the needy. For, he has dishonored the church and defiled the blessed crown.

If he is a nobleman and cannot be caned, his fine and penance must be increased — two hundred drams distributed to the needy and two years of penance. Let him not return to the same defilement again. Afterwards, he will be permitted to enter the church and mingle with his friends. But if he is a peasant, he must be caned. He must pay a fine of one hundred drams to the church, which will be distributed to the poor. And after one year of staying away from defilement, he will be permitted to enter the church and mingle with his friends. The same canon will apply to a man or a woman.

However, if someone is discovered fornicating before his marriage, either with a stranger or with his betrothed, he must pay a fine to the person he dishonored of whatever the father or the mother of the virgin decides, according to the law commanded by Moses²⁸. If he wishes to

²⁴ The phrase literally means “fornicating servant or slave”.

²⁵ Gen 2:18.

²⁶ Heb 13:4.

²⁷ 1 Cor 7:4.

²⁸ The reference is to the teaching in Deut 22:28–29, “If a man meets a virgin who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are caught in the act, the man who lay with her shall give fifty shekels of silver to the young woman's father, and she shall become his wife. Because he violated her he shall not be permitted to divorce her as long as he lives.”

take the same girl as a wife, let them first be purified by penance. And if they come to be crowned [into matrimony], let their crowning be blessed not as that of virgins; but rather simply bless them with the sign of the cross as a second marriage.

Now if the fornication was committed with the girl's consent, then let neither her father nor mother have the money of the fine. Rather, let the man pay a fine of one hundred drams and the girl a fine of fifty drams to the church to be distributed to the poor.

If one of a couple is a virgin and the other a fornicator, bless the virgin as a virgin and let the fornicator, as though a second marriage, have a cross-shaped branch of vine [*ur*] placed over his head as a sign of the enemy's victory. Hereafter, be watchful.

IV. If anyone leaves his wife, the mother of his children, without any reason of fornication or of any sickness in her body, but because the husband becomes an adulterer and turns his eyes to another [woman], the following must be the judgment [against him]: the children, the house, the land, the water, and all [his belongings] must be distributed to the public, with half allocated to the wife. And if the wife wishes to bring another husband into the house, let her do so freely. Let them keep their share and fulfill the royal tax. The husband who left must do penance for seven years and pay the church a fine — if he is a nobleman, three hundred drams, but if he is a peasant, let him be caned and pay a fine of one hundred drams to the church for having dishonored the blessed matrimony.

And, while they [i.e., the man and his wife] are still in opposition and paying penalties, if a [another] woman dares to become the wife of the arrogant wife-repudiator while one year has not yet passed, it becomes evident why he left the first woman. The [second] woman must be seized and be brought to the leprosarium²⁹ to grind one year for the lepers. If she is a noblewoman and does not go to a leprosarium, she must pay a fine of one hundred drams to the lepers.

V. If a man takes a wife who should prove barren, and the husband divorces her because of her barrenness, let her take all her belongings including her maidservants, animals, clothing and money, and go. And if besides being barren, the woman has no other stigma, the husband must also pay a fine to his wife for the dishonor he caused — one thousand two hundred drams if he is a nobleman and six hundred drams if he is a peasant.

²⁹ The word "leprosarium" is used in this article to translate the Armenian *godenoc* meaning "a place where lepers live".

However, while they are in arbitration and compensation and one year has not yet passed, if a woman dares to come and marry the husband, let them seize this woman and take her to the leprosarium. For it is obvious that she was the reason for the man to leave his wife. And for one year let her grind for the lepers and continue to serve. And let her pay one hundred drams to the church as a fine, because she was the reason that the true marriage was dissolved. However, if she is a noblewoman and cannot go to the leprosarium, let her pay the lepers a fine of one hundred drams.

Furthermore, if the husband had previously told her saying, “I will leave mine and take you”, or if they became consumed in adultery, the husband must pay a fine of one hundred drams to the church. And his penance must be three years standing with the catechumens, and one year entering the church under sponsorship.

Whoever leaves his children’s mother, or a barren woman [for another], without any reason of fornication or other immorality, the penalty for the man and the [other] woman is a fine and penance. This canon and statute will apply.

VI. If a woman leaves her husband, they shall seize her and bring her back to her husband, and especially [if her father] was compensated [for the marriage] and [she was] not [taken by the husband] for fornication. [Then the husband] can either sell her or keep her as a slave. But if they [i.e., the husband and his wife] so desire, let them live with spiritual and good advice and love.

However, if the husband is a wicked man, a fornicator, a gambler, drunkard or a pervert, let them rebuke the husband by caning and counseling him, and reconcile the couple. If the husband is a nobleman, discipline him with penalty and advice. And if the husband is easily reformed, let the wife follow him.

VII. Concerning those who kidnap, the [kidnapped] woman must be taken [from the kidnappers] and brought back to her father and mother. And [the kidnappers] must pay a fine for their dishonoring act — one thousand two hundred drams if he is a nobleman and six hundred if a peasant. And those who had formed a gang to help the man — the false-husband — must pay a fine of one hundred drams. Half of the money paid by the gang must be given to the church and the other half to the needy. But if the false-husband fornicated with the girl without marrying her³⁰,

³⁰ Since this canon deals with a married man who is found in adultery with another woman, and in order to distinguish the wife from the other woman, the Armenian word for girl, *atch’ik* is used to refer to the other woman, while the wife is referred to as *kin*.

he must pay a fine of one hundred drams to the church, because he had defiled the crown of blessing. Let him remain three years in penance.

Furthermore, if an elder secretly crowns the girl [in marriage] without the knowledge of the girl's father and mother, let the elder be removed from his priestly office. And he must pay a fine of one hundred drams, which should be distributed to the needy. The crowning at which he officiated will be considered annulled. Then, if after these problems and penalties they [i.e., the man and the girl] once again come to an agreement by the will of the girl and her parents, and if they had fornicated before, do not bless the crown. Rather, as a second-marriage, let their heads be covered with a cross-shaped branch of vine. However, if they have remained virgin, the crowning should be blessed according to the law. This canon will apply to nobleman and peasants.

VIII. If a man or a woman are found to be engaged in sorcery or in apostasy or in other evil works, and do not turn to repentance and penance, they must be stoned according to the order of the Scriptures. However, if they confess, let them spend the rest of their life in penance — twelve years at the doors [of the church] with the catechumens and three years with the penitents. Always examine their steps in being merciful and having pity on the poor. And let them spend their money on the needy, to earn the salvation of their souls. By frequent tears they will receive their viaticum³¹.

IX. Those who go to soothsayers and diviners must pay a fine of two hundred drams if they are noblemen. And if they are peasants, let them be caned fifteen times and pay a fine of one hundred drams, which will be given to the needy. After three years of penance, they can be brought back into communion.

Moreover, if a bishop or an elder goes to soothsayers and that is verified by two or three witnesses — for it is written, “Do not accept an accusation against a priest except with three witnesses”³² — the bishop must be deposed from his bishopric, and the priesthood of the elder must be annulled. The bishop will pay a fine of one thousand drams, and the elder a fine of five hundred drams, which will be distributed to the needy of

³¹ The Classical Armenian text literally reads, “they will receive the final allowance”. The word “viaticum”, from a Latin word meaning “allowance” or “provision”, is used in this translation to refer to the final communion given to a person near, or in danger of, death.

³² 1 Tim 5:19.

the church. Let them blame themselves, for “is it because there is no God in Israel that they go to *Ch’anch’ik*, the god of Ekron?”³³

Furthermore, if members of the clerks or of the order of the solitaries [*abelayic’*] or the son of an elder, go to soothsayers, they must bear the penalty, fine and penance of the lay offenders, and be deposed from their office.

The above canon applies to those going to soothsayers, both men and women.

X. [This canon concerns] those who merely enchant but do not practice magic. If men or women are found enchanting [*diwt’ut’ean*], let them be caned fifteen times, branded, blackened and let them hang a bone. They will be taken to the leprosarium and grind there for the lepers for two years, and they will do whatever they are commanded to do. If he is a nobleman and does not go to the leprosarium, he must pay five hundred drams to the leprosarium and spend two years of penance in his church. Then, let him be restored to communion and sin no more.

XI. [This canon concerns] those who lament and cry hopelessly after the dead, instead of giving a hopeful and blessed farewell. Regarding this matter³⁴, the Apostle says, “If for this life only we have hope in Christ, we are pitiful”³⁵, and also, “Do not be ignorant concerning those who are asleep, as hopeless heathens”³⁶. Thus, if a noblemen or peasant act against the canons of the Apostles and lament, let them be anathematized, both the initiator of the lament and those lamenting. For one year they will not enter the church. Furthermore, they will pay a fine of one hundred drams if noblemen and fifty drams if peasants. Let the money be distributed to the poor. For, they have angered God and troubled the soul of the departed. By paying this money to the poor, God may be reconciled [with them], and the soul of the departed may rest.

More specifically, if the deceased person had not requested a lamentation, but his family did, let the person requesting the lamentation and the

³³ 2 Kgs 1:3. The word *ch’anch’ik* in Classical Armenian is the diminutive of the word for “fly”. The Hebrew text in 2 Kgs 1:3 uses the phrase “Baal-zebul”, which means “Lord of flies.” For the etymology of the word “Beelzebub” see W.E.M. Aitken, *Beelzebub, Journal of Biblical Literature* 31 (1912), p. 52.

³⁴ This phrase in the Classical Armenian text is connected with the one preceding it with the conjunctive phrase “for which”. Thus, the sentence reads, “Those who lament and cry hopelessly after the dead, instead of giving a hopeful and blessed farewell, for which the Apostle says.”

³⁵ 1 Cor 15:19.

³⁶ 1 Thes 4:12.

people lamenting be removed from the blessing of the church, as we mentioned [earlier]. And the family may not receive the Eucharist for the departed one, because they are excommunicated. However, let the elders and the clerks of the church offer the Eucharist, by their own initiative, in the name of the deceased one, as if requested by a worthy person. When the family returns to order, they can ask the church to remember the name [of the deceased] in the Holy Mystery [Eucharist] so that the soul may rest in peace³⁷. However, if the deceased during his lifetime had requested them to lament, then the fines prescribed by the canons must be doubled. The family and the lamenters must bear the penalty prescribed. However, let no one offer the Eucharist for the deceased and make no remembrance of him. Let them not remember his name because of his hopelessness [concerning life after death].

XII. [This canon concerns] a son who knows his stepmother³⁸. Regarding this³⁹, St. Paul reprimanded and lamented to the Corinthians saying, “This also happened, that a man had his father’s wife as his [wife]”⁴⁰, “excommunicate him [who has done this]. Remove him from among you and deliver him into the hands of Satan, so that [his] soul may be saved on the Day of Judgment”⁴¹. Furthermore, [remember] how Ruben the son of Jacob was cursed because he slept with his father’s concubine. Thus, the canons reject a person who takes his stepmother as his wife. Such a person must not be allowed to enter the church and must be anathematized in all the councils until he returns [to the right path] and does penance for seven years with the catechumens and three years under sponsorship, and pays fifty drams to the poor and fifty drams to the church. And let him be restored to communion after examining his other conduct.

If a father knows his son’s wife or a brother his brother’s [wife], the same penalties and anathemas are applied. Thus, let no one have the wife of a close relative [*ǰerm harazat*] or of the next to kin [*azgakan*] as a wife or to fornicate with her. However, if the fornication is by the will of the wife, let her bear the penalty, the fine, and the anathema. And they must place the wife in penance and take her to the leprosarium to grind for the

³⁷ The Classical Armenian text is in the plural, i.e., “the souls may rest in peace”.

³⁸ The Armenian phrase for “father’s wife” has been translated as “stepmother”.

³⁹ This phrase in the Classical Armenian text is connected with the one preceding it by the conjunction “which”. Thus, the sentence reads, “A son who knows his stepmother, which St. Paul reprimanded and bewailed.”

⁴⁰ 1 Cor 5:1.

⁴¹ 1 Cor 5:2 and 5.

lepers for ten years. If she is a noblewoman and does not go to the leprosarium, let her pay a fine of three hundred drams.

XIII. [This canon concerns] a man who takes a relative as a wife. This defilement and abomination must be exposed, and “must not be named among you”⁴². For, let no one mix with his bodily relative according to the habits of the heathens and the ungodly impious nations. So also the great teacher of the law, the prophet Moses, received the command from the redeemer, “Instruct the children of Israel that no man shall draw near to any of his bodily relatives to uncover their nakedness”⁴³. And in cursing, Moses wrote, “Cursed is he who lies with his blood relative”⁴⁴.

Thus, let no one who is clothed with Christianity, with God-worshipping, and with the Lord’s baptism — the royal seal and stamp — touch a sister or a sister’s daughter or a brother’s daughter or an aunt or whoever belongs to his people, until the fourth degree and take her as a wife, so as not to tear the holy faith into pieces. Such a person will be “storing up wrath for himself”⁴⁵. “The illegitimate child will not come to maturity, and the offspring of an unlawful union will not flourish”⁴⁶. For, if having a brother’s wife caused the beheading of the great prophet and the forerunner John⁴⁷, then what greater misfortunes should not be considered for him who takes his relative as a wife, which Christian law and the Apostles and disciples of Christ forbid?

Now, if someone who opposes the laws and the established canons impiously returns to heathenism and Judaism, let his share be with them and let him be estranged from the holy church, as it is written “Let the ungodly be taken away that he may not see the glory of the Lord”⁴⁸. “Let him be numbered among the transgressors”⁴⁹. As the Scriptures say, “Depart from me all you who work iniquity”⁵⁰. No one will accept his sacrifice because his sacrifice is defiled before God. And if the person offering the sacrifice is unclean, all the more so are his offerings. Neither the church nor the canons accept his penance. For [it is written] “Perverse

⁴² Eph 5:3.

⁴³ Lev 18:6.

⁴⁴ Deut 27:20–23.

⁴⁵ Rom 2:5.

⁴⁶ Wisd 3:16.

⁴⁷ This comment refers to the biblical story of the beheading of John the Baptist by King Herod. John the Baptist had been publicly criticizing the king for taking his brother’s wife, Herodia, as his own wife. See Matt 14:3–11.

⁴⁸ Is 26:10.

⁴⁹ Is 53:12 and Mark 15:28.

⁵⁰ Ps 6:8.

men shall depart from me and I will have nothing to do [with them]”⁵¹, until they leave and return from perverse and unclean works, as the prophet proclaims, “Remove your iniquities says the Lord”⁵².

If someone blesses the marriage of such people or goes to the wedding, he becomes a participant in their evil works and must be removed from the order of the clerks. And, if a bishop or an elder is found in this counsel, let him be removed from his throne and his priesthood, and let him not approach the order of the clerks. But, if those who have stepped away from the holy laws and the orders of the church return from their defiled marriage and separate from each other, give up to half of their income and their belongings to the needy, suffering people and to the church, and do penance the rest of their life, at the end of their lives they may be worthy of communion. Furthermore, the leaders of the church who were present and who blessed the marriage must pay a fine of five hundred drams to the poor, if a bishop, and two hundred drams, if an elder, and whoever blessed the marriage, two hundred drams. Then they may be accepted back to their throne and priesthood.

However, if they do not turn back from their defiled marriage, let him who blessed the marriage and the clergy who were present at the sacrament be deposed from their throne and their priesthood. The same canon will apply whether for a nobleman or a peasant.

And if someone argues asking why [penalties] in the Nicene canons are not as harsh, [it is] because no one was expecting that evil works and crimes of such great magnitude would happen in the world. Otherwise, as early as that time, they would have cut off the evil roots of destruction.

XIV. Let neither a bishop nor an elder nor a deacon nor whoever belongs to the clerks or to a [religious] community have a house-woman [*tantikin*], as is the custom of the filthy ones⁵³. And if someone has and it is verified by witnesses, let him be deposed from his order, whatever that may be, and be considered as an impious person and a publican. For the church and the mysteries of the Lord accept only the pure, in order that the impure may be saved by the pure.

XV. If anyone stands in faith and wants to be a hermit [*miaynageacʿ*], to keep his purity and virginity and to attain eternal life, let him stay with

⁵¹ Ps 101:4.

⁵² Is 1:16.

⁵³ The phrase “filthy ones” is the English translation of the Armenian word *mctnēutʿiwn*. Garsoïan (1967), p. 208.

his true friends who live in a community, and let them win each other over by the love of Christ. For, “A brother helped by a brother is like a strong fortress”⁵⁴, “God settles the solitary person in a home”⁵⁵, and “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them”⁵⁶, and again, “If two people collectively ask anything of my Father, it will be given to them”⁵⁷, and “By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”⁵⁸.

Being alone should not become a habit. For, how then will one know the orders and terms of the faith?⁵⁹ Furthermore, how will one be able to acknowledge one’s faults or show humility and love towards one’s friends? This is how the beasts are on the mountains, when no one comes close to them. They remain at peace. Rather, the perfect and the true faith is the following: humility towards friends, love for one another and for Christ, setting a good example and being a role model among people, winning each other over and becoming zealous in good works, “so that they may see [your good works] and glorify God in heaven”⁶⁰. Furthermore, he — who with spiritual advice lifts up his brother who has stumbled and is dishonorable, and makes him honorable — will be called the mouth of God⁶¹.

Now, however, come my children and listen and I will teach you the fear of the Lord⁶², and [about] eternal life, and will declare to you [about] seeing the days of goodness during your lifetime⁶³. Listen and learn that it is pleasing to God to grant you eternal life. “Silence your tongue from evil and from deceit”⁶⁴. “Listen, the evil tongue burns fire in the body”⁶⁵. “Untie the shackles of injustice”⁶⁶. Set a strong door for the lips and a guard for the mouth⁶⁷, and do not be misled by evil words. [Do] “not lend money and demand it with interest”⁶⁸; “Return immediately the debt of

⁵⁴ Prov 18:19.

⁵⁵ Ps 68:6.

⁵⁶ Matt 18:20.

⁵⁷ Matt 18:19.

⁵⁸ John 13:35.

⁵⁹ The Classical Armenian text uses the third person plural pronoun “they” instead of the singular word “one”.

⁶⁰ Matt 5:16.

⁶¹ Jer 15:19.

⁶² Ps 34:11.

⁶³ 1 Pet 3:10.

⁶⁴ Ps 34:13.

⁶⁵ Jam 3:5–6.

⁶⁶ Is 58:6.

⁶⁷ Ps 141:3.

⁶⁸ Ezek 18:8.

the debtor”⁶⁹. “Sons of men, how long will you be harsh-hearted?”⁷⁰ [Do] not [be] tempestuous and apprehensive. “Who can endure an apprehensive man?”⁷¹ [Avoid] blood, sacrifice, adultery, fornication, robbery, avarice, covetousness, false oaths, lying, false accusation, drunkenness, gluttony, self-will, impulsiveness, pride, and haughtiness. Do not be arrogant, malevolent, and imperious. Do not be [involved in] theatres, sing shameless songs and ridiculous melodies, mock in vain, and be imprudent, oppressive, complaining, hateful, foolhardy, and talkative. Do not say or hear things about people, and do not do to others what seems bad to you. Do not be desirous or lazy. Do not be obstinate against education, lest you fall into evil works. Do not be idle in praying. Do not hate the poor, for in the evil days they may rescue you and not deliver you into the hands of the enemies. Do not hate fasting and the ascetic life, which extinguishes the fire, halts the lion⁷², and makes it possible to talk with God. Rather, do completely what belongs to the class of beneficent works; to “love the Lord your God with all your heart”⁷³, and to implement his commandments. “Be peaceful with all”⁷⁴. Be meek and humble. Always tremble, be fearful and listen to His words, which say, “In whom shall I dwell, if not in the meek and the humble, and in him who trembles at my words?”⁷⁵ “Seek peace and pursue justice”⁷⁶. Look for hope. Do not vainly enter into mourning and grief. “Do not be weary in doing good things”⁷⁷, so that you may live unto the ages of ages, in heaven as a perfect man and on earth with an angelic appearance. This canon applies to all those who want to be solitaires and to follow the life of virgins and solitaires [*habetayutiwn*], who will remain in the faith. For through the pure the sinners will be sanctified.

XVI. He who wishes to be a bishop, a leader [*aiʾaʾjnord*], a shepherd or a solitary [*vanakan*], or to build a solitary community [*anapat*], or who wishes to be the chief of a town, of villages or solitaires [*anapatac*], let him listen to what they say, “If grandeur should flow in, set not your heart

⁶⁹ Ezek 18:7.

⁷⁰ Ps 4:3.

⁷¹ Prov 18:14.

⁷² Heb 11:33; Dan 6:22.

⁷³ Matt 22:37.

⁷⁴ Rom 12:18.

⁷⁵ Isa 66:2.

⁷⁶ Ps 34:14.

⁷⁷ 2 Thes 3:12.

upon it”⁷⁸. Talent is received as a loan and should be kept. It may be requested from you with interest. Be careful, shepherd of faith. Be ready.

Let no one be a bishop without the permission of the chief bishop of the country. Furthermore, no one should be the elder of a community or a solitary [*anapatawor*] without the permission of the bishop of the region.

If a bishop, an elder, or a nobleman among the judges or peasants accepts a bribe or shows favoritism in ordaining leaders [*arajnords*], preparing pastors for the church, and assigning community leaders and lawmakers (“for the heathens know that they are human”⁷⁹) and does not choose the truth and the worthy person, let the one who is zealous for holiness and for the laws even if he is one of those who are abject or despised be brought forward. Listen to what they say, “God chose the foolish and the weak of the world”⁸⁰ and “He raises up the poor from the rubbish to make them sit with princes”⁸¹, so that he may dishonor the haughty and the powerful, for “man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart”⁸². And by bribery and partiality, as Paul says, they make those who are defiled by sin and are the corruptors of the law, judges of the Church because of the silver that destroys⁸³. They will be cursed for their bribery⁸⁴, like the crucifiers who bribed the guards⁸⁵, and like Simon the magician who wanted to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit from the Apostles by wealth and silver⁸⁶. Those who take the bribe will also be anathematized from the Lord. Let the purse, which they took as a bribe be likened to the bribe that Judas took for betraying the Lord⁸⁷. Twice the amount of the bribe will be taken from them. Let them [i.e., those who paid the bribe] not prevail to reclaim the bribe, as did the crucifiers [who] bought the field⁸⁸. Rather, let them distribute it to the needy.

Let the bishop and the elder who, for one reason or another, takes a bribe — according to the Scriptures, “bribery blinds the hearts of the

⁷⁸ Ps 62:10.

⁷⁹ Ps 9:20.

⁸⁰ 1 Cor 1:27–28.

⁸¹ 1 Sam 2:8.

⁸² 1 Sam 16:7.

⁸³ 1 Cor 6:4.

⁸⁴ Deut 27:25.

⁸⁵ Matt 28:12–13.

⁸⁶ Act 8:18–24.

⁸⁷ The English word “purse” in this sentence translates the Classical Armenian *karasi*, which can also mean “furniture”, “wealth” or “luggage”. Lk 22:5–6.

⁸⁸ Matt 27:3–9.

princes”⁸⁹, and also “Do not take a bribe against a righteous person”⁹⁰, and “The truth was dragged along by the silver” — be anathematized in all the councils, and be removed from their [positions of] authority and priesthood. Let they who take bribes be considered as Gehazi the thief on whom the curse of the prophet came down⁹¹, for the blood of the soldiers will be requested from the general [*ditin*]. Therefore, they should seek to find the worthy.

Listen to the prophet, “Their hands are in iniquities and their right hand is filled with bribe”⁹². “Give them, O Lord, according to their iniquities”⁹³. For if the head and the feet are firm, then the middle parts are not on sand.

If the driver is drunk, the carriages will proceed as they will. If the sailor is sleeping, the ship will rapidly sink. If the shepherd is indifferent, the sheep will devour harmful grass. Likewise, if the leaders of the law are firm and true, then even more so those governed by them will not stumble. And if the foundation is unshakeable, the building will not be thrown in the river. If the shepherd is brave, the flock will not be devoured by beasts. If the general [*detn*] is careful and watchful, the army will remain at peace and will not be slaughtered. For you, *vardapets*, are generals [*detk'*] of the people and examples to the world. Looking up to you, they bring forth what you teach them. Thus, be careful.

XVII. Let no one who wants to deposit the relics of a martyr do so without the permission of the bishop of the country. Let no one commemorate the memory of a martyr or a council without the orders of the bishop. And if someone brings [the relics of] a martyr from a holy place, let him bring them to the bishop with witnesses and letters from the bishops of the area from which he brought [the relics]. Let him place them wherever is appropriate, with the permission of the bishop of his area.

Let him who wants to erect a table for the mystery of the Lord [Eucharist]⁹⁴ not do so without the permission of the bishop. However, every year on the day of the anniversary of the bringing of the relics, they

⁸⁹ Deut 16:19.

⁹⁰ Ps 15:5.

⁹¹ In 2 Kgs 5:20–27, we read about Gehazi who is a servant of the prophet Elisha. He is found guilty of dishonesty in his dealing with Naaman the Syrian. Elisha denounces Gehazi’s deception, saying “Naaman’s leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever” (2 Kgs 5:27).

⁹² Ps 26:10.

⁹³ Ps 28:4.

⁹⁴ Altars and shrines were usually built on the relics of martyrs. See Aa, p. 305; BP-G, p. 543; and Ormanian (1988), p. 13.

may commemorate in a big celebration the name of the martyr whose relics were brought. Be careful concerning honor and holiness, so that the anger of the holy martyrs who suffered for the sake of Christ will not be incurred. [Otherwise] wrath will befall upon the world instead of intercession.

XVIII. If a *vardapet* anathematizes, excommunicates or sentences by words of doctrine one of his disciples, his flock or his priests, let no *vardapet* from other places or bishop or elder bless the cursed one and forgive the one who is sentenced by word. However, if by faith and love he turns toward spiritual direction, then with benevolent counsel the peace-loving *vardapet* will intercede to reconcile him with the [i.e., his] *vardapet*.

For, “one is the Lord of all, one faith, one baptism”⁹⁵. There is one commandment for all, and we wait for the same hope. It is obligatory to keep the same unity in all churches, unanimously blessing the ones worthy of blessing and condemning and penalizing those who are unworthy. For through the agreement among all, their preaching will be firm and faithful to all, according to the words of the Lord which say, “By this they will know you, that you are my disciples, when you are unified and love one another”⁹⁶.

XIX. If an elder, a deacon or one of the solitaries is found in a filthy act⁹⁷, his priesthood will be annulled. He will be branded on the forehead with the sign of a fox⁹⁸ and he will be placed in solitude to do penance. And if he was found again in the same [filthy act], let them cut his two hamstrings⁹⁹, and take him to the leprosarium. For, “Man was in honor but did not know”¹⁰⁰. The same penalty applies to the solitary [*abetayin*] as well.

Furthermore, if men with [their] wives and children are found in the cult¹⁰¹, let the hamstrings of the men, the women, and the adult children

⁹⁵ Eph 4:5.

⁹⁶ John 13:35.

⁹⁷ The phrase “in a filthy act” is the English translation of the Classical Armenian phrase *i mctnēut’ean*. Garsoïan (1967), p. 208.

⁹⁸ Branding was a common yet severe punishment for sinners and criminals alike even before Christianity. In 3 Macc 2:29, for example, we read about an incident in which Jews were branded by Ptolemy Philopator I (217 BC) with the Dionysian ivy-leaf symbol. St. Paul refers to this practice in I Tim 4:2.

⁹⁹ Garsoïan (1967), p. 83.

¹⁰⁰ Ps 48:13 and 21 [Septuagint].

¹⁰¹ The Classical Armenian word for “cult” in this case, *aland*, can also be translated as “false doctrine”.

be cut and their foreheads be branded with the sign of a fox and [let them] be sent to the leprosarium for penance. Moreover, the [younger] children, who do not know defilement, will be taken and given into the hands of the holy servants of God, to nourish and teach them the true faith and the fear of the Lord.

XX. If someone among the people is found to be an evildoer, and the elders know about him but do not tell the bishop, then upon investigating the matter and finding out that it is true, and knowing that the elder knew about the matter days and months in advance, but did not complain to the bishop, let them bear the same penalties as the ones imposed by the canons against those who commit licentious acts. And let the elders not have the right to serve the priesthood during their lifetime, so that the other elder or solitary [*vanakan*] who replaces them [i.e. those who have sinned], looking at them, may rightly tend the people.

However, if the elder tells the bishop and this is verified by witnesses, but the bishop tries to hide it or cover it up or be biased in favor of the evildoer, and if by testimony it becomes confirmed that truly the complaints of the elders had reached the bishop's ears, but the bishop had gone against the commandments of God, had not "sought the lost"¹⁰², and was not ardent and zealous for the laws of God, let him be deposed from his throne and the elder be considered innocent.

However, if the bishop had tried and was zealous, and the elders and other people attest to the work of the bishop to reveal the evildoer to the authorities, and yet the ruler, who was the chief of the region and of the village — the prince, the lord of the region — wishes to support the defilement and hide the adulterers and ignore their defilement because of money or his partiality, and if he does not choose to love Christ and his commandments and to be zealous for the laws of the Lord in soul and body, then such a person must be condemned and excommunicated from the church until he renders the evildoers into the hands of the bishop.

If a defilement is found in the house of a *naxarar*, whether [it be by] his wife, daughter, son, or himself, and he refuses to surrender his family into the hands of the bishop, or turn to the holy life, but wishes to be a hostage, let him be anathematized with his entire household, children and life. He must not be allowed to come out in public places, and let no one from his friends or from the people consort with him until he

¹⁰² In Ezek 34:16, we read, "I will seek the lost". See also Lk 15:1–10.

returns from defilement to holiness. And if he was not in defilement [but his family members and servants were], let him render his family and servants to the chief bishop for rebuke.

And if defilement is found in the house of a prefect [*ostikan*], whether by him or by his wife, let them reprimand the family, as we said, according to the legal penalty. But if he also with his family is found in a filthy act, let him be seized together with his defiled family and let them be brought to a public place in front of the chief bishop and the eminent princes [*išxan*] and the senior judges, and unanimously they will avenge the laws of God, so that others, by seeing this, will worship the Creator of all with fear.

For the orders of worshipping God are made alive and perfect by being zealous for the laws and by respecting the saints, so that we may be the true servants of God by words and deeds, and likewise we may expect good reward from the beneficent God and inherit his eternal gifts unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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